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| TITLE | Discussing Controversial Issues: An Overview of Four Lessons (Creating Open Discussion, Keeping the Discussion Focused, Analyzing Different Points of View and Ending Discussions). |
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ABSTRACT

The learning module described here provides systematic training for secondary school teachers and students in discussion skills. The content focuses on techniques to facilitate reflective, open inquiry into controversial issues. Methods of setting up and running workshops in group discussion are described. Information is provided on the purposes and content of the module as well as activities and resources involved. A critique, history of development, and ordering information are also included. (JD)

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# DESCRIPTION OF TEACHER INSERVICE EDUCATION MATERIALS

## SUMMARY INFORMATION

**Title:** DISCUSSING CONTROVERSIAL ISSUES: An Overview of Four Lessons (Creating Open Discussion, Keeping the Discussion Focused, Analyzing Different Points of View and Ending Discussions)

**Publication Date(s):** Copyright 1975

**Intended Users:** Pre and inservice for high school teachers and students who want to develop their skills in discussing controversial issues

**Grade Level(s):** Secondary

**Number:** The developer recommends a maximum of ten persons per workshop group.

**Primary Focus:** The intent of the program is to provide systematic training for teachers and students in discussion skills. The content focuses on techniques to facilitate reflective, open inquiry.

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***School subject(s) and/or inservice topic(s) covered:*** The school subjects most relevant to this program are those where the curriculum raises social, personal and moral issues (e. g., social studies, English). The inservice topics covered are planning, grouping, discipline, classroom management and evaluation of self and students.

***What participant does in using the materials:*** The participant attends an orientation seminar (conducted by a coordinator) for each of the four lessons. The sequence of activities for each lesson is: read the appropriate Teacher and Student Handbook chapters, view the videotape, plan and hold a class discussion, tape a second class discussion, and evaluate the moderator skills (as recorded on tape). The Teacher's Handbook outlines activities for conducting a high school course (23 sessions) using the videotape cassettes and the Student Handbooks.

***Resources:*** The materials include four (16 - 20 minute) videotape cassettes, or four 16 mm films, a Teacher's Handbook (146 pages), Coordinator's Handbook (28 pages) and a Student Handbook (33 pages).

The developer recommends a course of about 8 weeks duration with four 3-1/2 hour inservice workshops and several weeks for preparation for the course by the coordinator.

***Describer critique:*** This is a self-instructional, self-pacing and self-evaluative course which is unified by a shared learning experience with other staff and a coordinator. Persons teach themselves by carrying out activities in classrooms suggested in the Handbooks and in sharing ideas, reactions, feedback and evaluations with other participants. The Handbooks are clearly written and illustrated, easy to read and contain many instructions, on how to learn the course, as well as teach it.

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# 1.0 PURPOSES:

Rationale

The developers state in the Introduction to the Coordinator's Handbook: "The purpose of this course is to provide training in moderator and participant techniques so that students and teachers will make effective use of ... discussions ... Another rationale ... is helping students to inform themselves on socially important matters, to understand alternative viewpoints, to support free communication and to communicate honestly with others ... Still another reason ... is its usefulness as a vehicle of communication ..."

Goals

The goal of the program is to develop students' insights into their own and others' opinions, that they are exposed to all points of view, that they develop criteria for making their own judgments and become active discussion participants. The goal for teachers is that they learn to become more effective discussion moderators.

Objective:

The developers state these specific objectives in the 3 Handbooks:

Course Objective: Develop skills for discussing controversial issues effectively.

Lesson 1 Objective: Have an open discussion in which people feel free to say what they think.

Lesson 2 Objective: Listen to others and keep the discussion focused.

Lesson 3 Objective: Analyze different points of view.

Lesson 4 Objective: Evaluate the effectiveness of a discussion.

## 2.0 CONTENT — Scope and Sequencing of Topics:

Scope

Each of the four lessons focuses on developing these moderator and participant skills and techniques:

| Lesson 1: Moderator | Participant |
|---|---|
| 1. Support every person's right to his own opinion. | 1. Talk to each other, not just the moderator. |
| 2. Use supportive silence to promote group interaction. | 2. Don't monopolize. |
| 3. Distribute participation by calling on silent group members. | 3. Ask others what they think. |
| | 4. Don't engage in personal attack. |

| Lesson 2: | |
|---|---|
| 1. State the issue at the beginning of the discussion. | 1. Listen to others' ideas. |
| 2. Restate the issue to keep the discussion focused. | 2. Acknowledge others' ideas. |
| 3. Summarize statements made by participants. | 3. Question irrelevant remarks. |

| Lesson 3: | |
|---|---|
| 1. State areas of agreement or disagreement. | 1. Ask for clarification. |
| 2. Ask for temporary agreements to break up deadlocks. | 2. Ask for reasons for others' opinions. |
| 3. Ask for clarification. | 3. Give reasons for your opinions. |
| 4. Ask for reasons why someone holds a particular viewpoint. | |

| Lesson 4: | |
|---|---|
| 1. Ask for a brief review. | 1. Review the main points of the discussion. |
| 2. Ask participants to explain viewpoints different from their own. | 2. Explain viewpoints different from yours. |
| 3. Ask participants to tell their current opinion and how the discussion affected it. | 3. Tell your current opinion and how the discussion affected it. |
| 4. Ask about the next step for the group or individuals. | 4. Suggest the next step for the group or for you personally. |

The Coordinator Handbook includes: 1) a checklist of the coordinator's responsibilities, 2) an introduction to the course, 3) strategies for coordinating the course, 4) suggestions for an orientation session and teacher seminars, and 5) an appendix (policy statements, footnotes, and a bibliography.)

The Teacher Handbook 1) introduces the course, 2) discusses planning, 3) probes each of the four lessons, 4) provides follow-up strategies to implement each lesson (including assessment forms), and has an appendix (a policy statement, a sample self-evaluation form, and opinion questionnaire for students and a bibliography.)

The Student Handbook is a cartoon illustrated discussion of each of the four lessons with an introduction to the course.

Sequence

The three handbooks treat the four lesson course in the order of their numbering.

## 3.0 ACTIVITIES AND RESOURCES INVOLVED IN USE OF PRODUCT

### 3.1 Description of main *inservice* activities:

The participant follows these activities in sequence:

1) attend a seminar conducted by the coordinator,
2) read the appropraite chapters in the Teacher Handbook and Student Handbook,
3) view a videotape cassette (or film),
4) show it to students and then conduct a discussion,
5) hold a second session and tape record it, and
6) evaluate his moderator skills by completing the self-evaluation forms (in the Teacher Handbook) and listening to the tape recording.

### 3.2 Help given in use of product:

The Coordinator Handbook outlines a course (1 - 2 months) and includes suggestions for arranging for space, time, materials, credits, and salary increments or stipends. The Teacher Handbook explains the course in each of the four lessons. The Student Handbook highlights the course, and focuses on each lesson, using a comicbook format.

## 4.0 EVALUATION OF TEACHER INSERVICE LEARNING

The Teacher Handbook includes self-evaluation forms at the end of each lesson chapter. Each form is a checklist to be filled out in conjunction with listening to a tape recording of a class discussion.



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## 5.0 ORDERING INFORMATION

### 5.1 Resources required/recommended for implementing product:

A 3/4" videotape cassette recorder (or 16 mm film projector) is required. One Coordinator Handbook, a Teacher Handbook and Student Handbook (copies of the latter two should correspond to the number of course participants) are needed. The developers recommend that the inservice be conducted by a coordinator (advisor, supervisor, faculty person, administrator) who is knowledgeable about the subject.

The developers suggest preparation time for the coordinator to be about 10-15 hours before the course, 2-5 hours weekly during the course, and 2-5 hours after the course for follow-up and evaluation. A tape recorder and tapes are needed to record class discussions for evaluation.

### 5.2 Distributor name/address:

Agency for Instructional Television
Box A
Bloomington, Indiana 47401

812-339-2203, Field Services Department, for ordering information
415-565-3016, Beatrice Ward, Far West Laboratory, for development information

### 5.3 Components/approximate costs:

| Component | Purchase | Rental | No. Req. | Reusable |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| DISCUSSING CONTROVERSIAL ISSUES | $450/set of 4 cassettes<br>$650/set of 4 16 mm film | $50/per week/ per cassette or film | 1 | Yes |

1) 4 videotape cassettes or four 16 mm films:

   a. Creating an Open Discussion,
   b. Keeping the Discussion Focused
   c. Analyzing Different Points of View
   d. Ending Discussions

2) Coordinator Handbook .... $1.50/1-499 copies
   $1.35/500 and over
3) Teacher Handbook .....$4.00/1-499 copies
   $3.60/500 copies
4) Student Handbook .....$1.25/1-499 copies
   $1.12/500 and over



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# 6.0 HISTORY OF DEVELOPMENT

## 6.1 Identification of the developer:

The course was developed by Morris K. Lai, Meredith D. Gall, Rachel Ann Elder and Rita Weathersby, staff of the Effective Teacher Education Program, the Far West Laboratory for Educational Research and Development, San Francisco, California.

## 6.2 How developed and when:

The course was developed and tested over a three year period during the late 1960's. Prototype materials were tried out and commented on by several hundred students, teachers and administrators in three field tests prior to this version.

## 6.3 Evidence of effectiveness with users:

A field test report, issued June, 1972, records data on behavioral changes among 46 teachers who completed the course. In general, the teachers found the course useful. In particular, they commented favorably on the clarity and good organization of the Teacher Handbook, the content of the student materials and the videotapes/films. Teachers observed changes in their students, particularly their increased respect for each other. They felt they improved in their ability to moderate discussions as well as teach the participant skills.

# DESCRIBER CRITIQUE

## Appropriateness / adaptability / technical quality:

The field test report on the course effectiveness suggests that it is appropriate for teaching students and teachers techniques of effectively discussing controversial issues. The course is adaptable for use in other grades and, although it is most frequently applied to discussions in social studies and English classes, it can also be used in art, literature and science classes and programs. The technical quality of the materials is excellent.

## Content accuracy/social fairness/community acceptance issues:

Many of the techniques taught in the program are based on the work of Oliver and Shaver (1966) done at Harvard University and Massialas (1966) at the University of Michigan in the field of social studies education. Throughout the course, discussion topics are suggested and worked through on videotape/film and in print. These topics challenge one's biases, prejudices and myths held about other people's views, lifestyles and behaviors. Therefore, the intent/content of the course helps assure social fairness and community acceptance by persons of different age, sex, race and ethnicity.

## Overall summary/comment:

The program provides structure and content without imposing uniformity of use and rigidity in application. The developers provide guidelines for planning activities and suggestions for using the course materials. Teachers decide how long to spend on a lesson, which topics for discussion to choose, and select assignments that maintain students' interests. The course is appropriate for both beginning and experienced teachers and can be offered under the auspices of a single school, a school district or a university training program.

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